

15 Minute City

Carlos Moreno (born 16 April 1959 in [Colombia](#)) is a Franco-Colombian [urbanist](#) and [Sorbonne University](#) professor.

Career

He is mainly known for his contribution to the [15-Minute City](#) concept.[1][2]

The City Diplomacy Lab of [Columbia University](#), appointed Moreno as a member of its scientific board.[3]

Moreno is a former member of the [M-19](#) (violent revolutionary guerilla warfare) movement.[4]

Distinctions

- The Spanish private sector for [sustainable mobility](#), grouped in the "Plataforma de Empresas Para La Movilidad Sostenible"[5] to Carlos Moreno for the [15-Minute City](#) project.
- He was awarded the rank of Chevalier of the Order of the Legion of Honour in Paris in 2010[6] [7] and the 2019 Foresight Medal by the French Academy of Architecture.
- On 4 October 2021, World Habitat Day announced the [Obel Award](#)[8] for his contribution to [15 Minute City](#).
- In March 2022, Carlos Moreno became an ambassador for the French Pavilion[9] of the world's largest ecological, economic and cultural gathering [Floriade](#), which will take place in the Netherlands from 14 April to 9 October 2022 under the theme[10] "[Growing Green Cities](#)".

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15-minute city



The 15-minute city was influenced by cities such as [Paris](#), in which a range of amenities tend to be within walking distance

The **15-minute city (FMC)**^[1] is an [urban planning](#) concept in which most daily necessities and services, such as work, shopping, education, healthcare, and leisure can be easily reached by a 15-minute walk or bike ride from any point in the city.^[2] This approach aims to reduce car dependency, promote healthy and sustainable living, and improve the overall quality of life for city dwellers.

Implementing the 15-minute city concept requires a multi-disciplinary approach, involving transportation planning, urban design, and policymaking, to create well-designed public spaces, pedestrian-friendly streets, and mixed-use developments. This change in lifestyle may include remote working which reduces daily commuting and is supported by the recent widespread availability of [information and communications technology](#) (ICT). The concept has been described as a "return to a local way of life".^[3]

The concept's roots can be traced to pre-modern urban planning traditions where walkability and community living were the primary focus before the advent of street networks and automobiles^[citation needed]. In recent times, it builds upon similar pedestrian-centered principles found in [New Urbanism](#), [transit-oriented development](#), and other similar proposals that promote walkability, mixed-use developments, and compact, livable communities.^[4] Numerous models have been proposed about how the concept can be implemented, like 15-minute cities being built from a series of smaller 5-minute [neighborhoods](#), also known as [complete communities](#) or walkable neighborhoods.^[2]

The concept gained significant traction in recent years after [Paris](#) mayor [Anne Hidalgo](#) included a plan to implement the 15-minute city concept during her 2020 re-election campaign.[\[5\]](#) Since then, a number[\[which?\]](#) of cities worldwide have adopted the same goal and many researchers have used the 15-minute model as a spatial analysis tool to evaluate accessibility levels within the urban fabric.[\[4\]\[2\]\[6\]](#)

History

The 15-minute city concept is derived from [historical](#) ideas about [proximity](#) and [walkability](#), such as [Clarence Perry](#)'s controversial [neighborhood unit](#). As an inspiration for the 15-minute city, an advisor to Anne Hidalgo, Professor Carlos Moreno, cited [Jane Jacobs](#)'s model presented in *[The Death and Life of Great American Cities](#)*.[\[7\]\[8\]\[9\]](#)

The ongoing [climate crisis](#) and global [COVID-19 pandemic](#) have prompted a heightened focus on the 15-minute city concept. [\[8\]](#) In July 2020, the [C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group](#) published a framework for cities to "build back better" using the 15-minute concept, referring specifically to plans implemented in [Milan](#), [Madrid](#), [Edinburgh](#), and [Seattle](#) after [COVID-19](#) outbreaks.[\[10\]](#) The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group report highlights the importance of inclusive community engagement through mechanisms like [participatory budgeting](#) and adjusting city plans and [infrastructure](#) to encourage dense, complete, overall communities.[\[10\]](#)

A [manifesto](#) published in [Barcelona](#) in April 2020 proposed radical change in the organization of cities in the wake of COVID-19, and was signed by 160 academics and 300 architects. The proposal has four key elements: reorganization of mobility, (re) naturalization of the city, de-commodification of housing, and de-growth.[\[11\]\[12\]\[13\]](#)

Research models

The 15-minute city is a proposal for developing a polycentric city, where density is made pleasant, one's proximity is vibrant, and social intensity (a large number of productive, intricately linked social ties) is real.[\[8\]\[14\]\[15\]\[16\]](#) The key element of the model has been described by Carlos Moreno as "chrono-urbanism" or a refocus of interest on time value rather than time cost.[\[8\]\[17\]](#)

Moreno and the 15-minute city

Moreno's 2021 article introduced the 15-minute city concept as a way to ensure that urban residents can fulfill six essential functions within a 15-minute walk or bike from their dwellings: living, working, commerce, healthcare, education and entertainment.[\[18\]](#) The framework of this model has four components; density, proximity, diversity and digitalization.[\[18\]](#)

Moreno cites the work of [Nikos Salingaros](#), who theorizes that an optimal density for urban development exists which would encourage local solutions to local problems.[\[18\]\[19\]](#) The authors discuss proximity in terms of both space and time, arguing that a 15-minute city would reduce the space and time necessary for activity.[\[18\]](#) Diversity in this 15-minute city model refers to [mixed-use development](#) and multicultural neighborhoods, both of which Moreno and others argue would improve

the urban experience and boost community participation in the planning process. Digitalization is a key aspect of the 15-minute city derived from [smart cities](#). Moreno and others argue that a [Fourth Industrial Revolution](#) has reduced the need for commuting because of access to technology like [virtual communication](#) and [online shopping](#). They conclude by stating that these four components, when implemented at scale, would form an accessible city with a high quality of life.[\[18\]](#)

Larson and the 20-minute city

[Kent Larson](#) described the concept of a 20-minute city in a 2012 [TED talk](#)[\[20\]](#) and his City Science Group at the [MIT Media Lab](#) has developed a neighborhood simulation platform [\[21\]](#) to integrate the necessary design, technology, and policy interventions into "compact urban cells". In his "On Cities" masterclass for the [Norman Foster Foundation](#),[\[22\]](#) Larson proposed that the planet is becoming a network of cities, and that successful cities in the future will evolve into a network of high-performance, resilient, entrepreneurial communities. [\[23\]](#)[\[time needed\]](#)

D'Acci and the T*-minute city

Since 2013 [\[24\]](#)[\[25\]](#) D'Acci presented the Isobenefit Urbanism:[\[26\]](#) a spontaneous-guided planning approach based on a morphogenetic code inducing a T*-minute city (T* = a reasonable time to reach destination by walking) where one can reach within 1km/1mile: natural land, shops, amenities, services and places of work. It is based on a code for the simulations of Isobenefit urban morphogenesis. It is a code to simulate urban growth scenario by modifying as one wishes the values of the parameters. The latter are related to densities, surface, population size, random factors and built probabilities. This urban growth model results in infinite outputs all satisfying the Isobenefit urbanism objective function. [\[24\]](#)[\[25\]](#)[\[27\]](#)[\[28\]](#)[\[29\]](#)

Weng and the 15-minute walkable neighborhood

Weng and his colleagues, in a 2019 article using [Shanghai](#) as a [case study](#), proposed the 15-minute walkable neighborhood with a focus on health, and specifically [non-communicable diseases](#).[\[2\]](#) The authors suggest that the 15-minute walkable neighborhood is a way to improve the health of residents, and they document existing disparities in [walkability](#) within Shanghai. They found that rural areas, on average, are significantly less walkable, and areas with low walkability tend to have a higher proportion of children.[\[2\]](#) Compared to Moreno et al., the authors focused more on the health benefits of walking and differences in walkability and usage across age groups.[\[18\]](#)[\[2\]](#)

Da Silva and the 20-minute city

Da Silva et al., in their 2019 article cite [Tempe, Arizona](#), as a case study of an urban space where all needs could be met within 20 minutes by walking, biking, or transit. The authors found that Tempe is highly accessible, especially by [bike](#), but that accessibility varies with geographic area. Compared to Moreno et al., the authors focused more on accessibility within the built environment.[\[30\]](#)

Implementations

Africa

[Lagos, Nigeria](#), converted schools that were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic into food markets to prevent panic buying. The program also decreased commute times and shored up food supplies within communities.[\[31\]](#)

Asia

In 2019, [Singapore's Land Transport Authority](#) proposed a master plan that included the goals of "20-minute towns" and a "45-minute city" by 2040.[\[32\]](#)

[Israel](#) has embraced the concept of a 15-minute city in new residential developments. According to Orli Ronen, the head of the Urban Innovation and Sustainability Lab at the Porter School for Environmental Studies at [Tel Aviv University](#), [Tel Aviv](#), [Haifa](#), [Beersheba](#), and central [Jerusalem](#) have been effective in delivering on the concept at least in part in new developments, but only Tel Aviv has been relatively successful.[\[33\]](#)

China

The 2016 Master Plan for Shanghai called for "15-minute community life circles", where residents could complete all of their daily activities within 15 minutes of walking. The community life circle has been implemented in other [Chinese](#) cities, like [Baoding](#) and [Guangzhou](#).[\[34\]](#)

The *Standard for urban residential area planning and design* (GB 50180–2018), a [national standard](#) that came into effect in 2018, stipulates four levels of residential areas: 15-min pedestrian-scale neighborhood, 10-min pedestrian-scale neighborhood, 5-min pedestrian-scale neighborhood, and a neighborhood block. Among them, "15-min pedestrian-scale neighborhood" means "residential area divided according to the principle that residents can meet their material, living and cultural demand by walking for 15 minutes; usually surrounded by urban [trunk roads](#) or site boundaries, with a population of 50,000 to 100,000 people (about 17,000 to 32,000 households) and complete supporting facilities."

[Chengdu](#), to combat urban sprawl, commissioned the "Great City" plan, where development on the edges of the city would be dense enough to support all necessary services within a 15-minute walk.[\[35\]](#)

Europe



Example of bike lane in Paris

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo introduced the 15-minute city concept in her 2020 re-election campaign and began implementing it during the [COVID-19](#) pandemic. For example, school playgrounds were converted to parks after hours, while the [Place de la Bastille](#) and other squares have been revamped with trees and [bicycle lanes](#).[\[36\]](#)

[Cagliari](#), a city on the [Italian island](#) of [Sardinia](#), began a strategic plan to revitalize the city and improve walkability.[\[37\]](#) The city actively solicited public feedback through a participatory planning process, as described in the Moreno model. A unique aspect of the plan calls for re-purposing public spaces and buildings that were no longer being used, relating to the general model of urban intensification.[\[37\]](#)

North America

In 2012, [Portland, Oregon](#) developed a plan for complete neighborhoods within the city, which are aimed at supporting youth, providing affordable housing, and promoting community-driven development and commerce in historically under-served neighborhoods.[\[38\]\[4\]](#) Similar to the Weng et al. model, the Portland plan emphasizes walking and cycling as ways to increase overall health and stresses the importance of the availability of affordable healthy food.[\[4\]](#) The Portland plan calls for a high degree of transparency and community engagement during the planning process, which is similar to the diversity component of the Moreno et al. model.[\[4\]](#)

South America

[Bogotá, Colombia](#) in March 2021, implemented 84 [kilometers](#) of bike lanes to encourage [social distancing](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.[\[39\]](#) This expansion complemented the [Ciclovía](#) practice that originated in Colombia in 1974, where bicycles are given primary control of the streets.[\[39\]](#) The resulting bicycle lane network is the largest of its kind in the world.[\[40\]](#)

Oceania

The city of [Melbourne, Australia](#) developed Plan Melbourne 2017–2050 to accommodate growth and combat sprawl.[\[4\]\[41\]](#) The plan contains multiple elements of the 15-minute city concept, including new bike lanes and the construction of "20-minute neighborhoods".[\[42\]\[43\]](#)

Implications

The 15-minute city, with its emphasis on [walkability](#) and [accessibility](#), has been put forward as a way to better serve groups of people that have historically been left out of planning, such as [women](#), [children](#), [people with disabilities](#), and the elderly.[\[4\]](#)

Social infrastructure is also emphasized in order to maximize urban functions such as [schools](#), [parks](#), and complementary activities for residents.[\[4\]](#) There is also a large focus on access to green space, which may promote positive environmental impacts such as increasing urban [biodiversity](#) and helping to protect the city from [invasive species](#).[\[4\]](#) Studies have found that increased access to green spaces can also have a positive impact on the mental and physical health of a city's inhabitants, reducing stress and negative emotions, increasing happiness, improving sleep, and promoting positive social

interactions.[44] Urban residents living near green spaces have also been found to exercise more, improving their physical and [mental health](#).[\[44\]](#)

Limitations

While the theory has many potential benefits, including reducing car dependence and promoting walkability in urban areas, it also has limitations.

One limitation is the difficulty or impracticality of implementing the 15-minute city concept in established urban areas, where land use patterns and infrastructure are already in place. Additionally, the concept may not be feasible in areas with low population density or in low-income communities where transportation options are limited.[\[3\]](#)

Furthermore, when the concept is applied as a literal spatial analysis research tool, it then refers to the use of an [isochrone](#) to express the radius of an area considered local.[\[6\]](#) Isochrones have a long history of utilization in transportation planning and are constructed primarily using two variables: time and speed. However, the reliance on population-wide conventions, such as gait speed, to estimate the buffer zones of accessible areas may not accurately reflect the mobility capabilities of specific population groups, like the elderly. This may result in potential inaccuracies and fallacies in research models.[\[6\]](#)

Criticism

While many cities have implemented policies along the 15-minute city concept, disagreement remains over whether the model benefits residents. Georgia Pozoukidou and Zoi Chatziyiannaki write in the journal [Sustainability](#) that the creation of dense, walkable urban cores often leads to [gentrification](#) or displacement of lower-income residents to outlying neighborhoods due to rising [property values](#); to counteract this, Pozoukidou and Chatziyiannaki argue for [affordable housing](#) provisions to be integral to FMC policies.[\[4\]](#) Further, price increases, like those associated with gentrification, could be harmful to [marginalized groups](#) like people with disabilities, forcing move-outs.[\[45\]](#)[\[according to whom?\]](#) Similarly, as the concept's origin is largely European, critics[\[who?\]](#) have argued that implementing the model could be colonialist and perpetuate harm to marginalized communities.[\[46\]](#)

In addition, critics[\[who?\]](#) have noted that models are not universal, as cities with less [urban sprawl](#), like those in Europe, are more likely to implement the concept than are cities with extensive sprawl, like those in Asia and North America.[\[36\]](#) Noted exceptions include [Chengdu](#), which utilized the 15-minute city concept to curb sprawl, and [Melbourne](#), where [Sally Capp](#), the [Lord Mayor of Melbourne](#), stressed the importance of [public transit](#) in expanding the radius of the 15-minute city.[\[42\]](#)

Conspiracy theories

Unfounded [conspiracy theories](#) about the 15-minute concept theories have flourished, including claims that the model will fine residents for leaving their home districts.[\[47\]](#)[\[48\]](#)[\[49\]](#) British Conservative Party MP [Nick Fletcher](#) called 15-minute cities an "international socialist concept" during a debate in the UK Parliament in February 2023.[\[50\]](#)[\[better source needed\]](#)

See also

- [Accessibility \(transport\)](#) – land planning metric of how a location can be accessed
- [Aging in place](#) – Ability to live in one's home and community safely and independently regardless of age
- [Active living](#) – Physically active way of life
- [Automotive city](#) – Urban planning prioritising automobiles
- [Bicycle-friendly](#) – Urban planning prioritising cycling
- [Carfree city](#) – Urban area absent of cars
- [Co-benefits of climate change mitigation](#) – Positive benefits of greenhouse gas reduction besides climate change mitigation
- [Compact city](#) – High density mixed use transit oriented planning
- [Cyclability](#) – Degree of the ease of cycling
- [Mixed-use development](#) – Type of urban development strategy
- [Most livable cities](#) – Annual survey based on living conditions in cities
- [New Urbanism](#) – Urban design movement promoting environmentally friendly land use
- [Obesity and walking](#) – Obesity and walking effects
- [Participatory budgeting](#) – decision-making process
- [Social influences on fitness behavior](#)
- [Street reclamation](#) – Changing streets to focus on non-car use
- [Transit-oriented development](#) – Urban planning prioritising transit
- [Transport divide](#) – Unequal access to transport
- [Urban density](#) – number of people inhabiting a given urbanized area
- [Urban sprawl](#) – Expansion of auto-oriented, low-density development in suburbs
- [Urban vitality](#) – Use intensity of a city space
- [Walking city](#) – One small enough to navigate on foot

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The **OBEL AWARD** is a global award presented annually to honour "recent and outstanding architectural contributions to human development all over the world."^[1]

The prize sum is €100,000, making the Obel Award one of the world's largest [architecture prizes](#) in terms of prize money. ^{[2][3]} The winner also receives an artwork by [Tomás Saraceno](#).^[1]

The award was founded by Danish businessman Henrik Frode Obel (1942-2014) and sponsored by the Henrik Frode Obel Foundation, based in Copenhagen, Denmark.^[1]

Besides the annual award ceremony, The Obel Award produces books and publications and presents exhibitions and lectures on themes within architecture.^{[4][5][6][7]}

Columbia University, also known as **Columbia**, and officially as **Columbia University in the City of New York**, is a [private Ivy League research university](#) in [New York City](#). Established in 1754 as **King's College** on the grounds of [Trinity Church](#) in [Manhattan](#), Columbia is the oldest institution of higher education in [New York](#) and the fifth-oldest institution of [higher learning](#) in the United States. It is one of nine [colonial colleges](#) founded prior to the [Declaration of Independence](#), and a member of the [Ivy League](#). Columbia is ranked among the most prestigious universities in the world.[9]

Columbia was established by [royal charter](#) under [George II of Great Britain](#). It was renamed [Columbia College](#) in 1784 following the [American Revolution](#), and in 1787 was placed under [a private board of trustees](#) headed by former students [Alexander Hamilton](#) and [John Jay](#). In 1896, the campus was moved to its current location in [Morningside Heights](#) and renamed Columbia University.

Columbia scientists and scholars have played a pivotal role in scientific breakthroughs including [brain-computer interface](#); the [laser](#) and [maser](#);^{[10][11]} [nuclear magnetic resonance](#);^[12] the first [nuclear pile](#); the first [nuclear fission](#) reaction in the [Americas](#); the first evidence for [plate tectonics](#) and [continental drift](#);^{[13][14][15]} and much of the initial research and planning for the [Manhattan Project](#) during [World War II](#).

Columbia is organized into twenty schools, including four undergraduate schools and 16 graduate schools. The university's research efforts include the [Lamont–Doherty Earth Observatory](#), the [Goddard Institute for Space Studies](#), and accelerator laboratories with [Big Tech](#) firms such as [Amazon](#) and [IBM](#).^{[16][17]} Columbia is a founding member of the [Association of American Universities](#) and was the first school in the United States to grant the [MD degree](#).^[18] The university also annually administers the [Pulitzer Prize](#). With over 15 million volumes, [Columbia University Library](#) is the third-largest private research library in the United States.^[19]

The university's endowment stands at \$13.3 billion in 2022, [among the largest](#) of any academic institution. As of December 2021, its alumni, faculty, and staff have included: [seven Founding Fathers](#) of the United States;^[n 2] [four U.S. presidents](#);^[n 3] 33 foreign [heads of state](#);^[n 4] two secretaries-general of the United Nations;^[n 5] ten justices of the [United States Supreme Court](#), one of whom currently serves; [101 Nobel laureates](#); 125 [National Academy of Sciences](#) members;^[60] 53 living billionaires;^[61] [22 Olympic medalists](#);^[62] 33 [Academy Award winners](#); and 125 Pulitzer Prize recipients.

Carlos Moreno, Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare in Colombia

The 19th of April Movement

The 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril--M-19) traces its origins to the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections of April 19, 1970, in which the populist party of former military

dictator Rojas Pinilla, the National Popular Alliance (Alianza Nacional Popular--Anapo), was denied an electoral victory (see [Opposition to the National Front](#) , ch. 1). Although Anapo--which was subsequently led by Rojas Pinilla's daughter, Marta Eugenia Rojas de Moreno Diaz, following the dictator's death in 1975--denied all links with the M-19, the organization proclaimed itself to be the armed branch of the party. During the early 1970s, Carlos Toledo Plata and Jaime Bateman Cayon distinguished themselves as the M-19's principal leaders and ideologues. Toledo, a physician, was an Anapo representative in Congress. Bateman served as the M-19's principal commander for military operations. Both these men died during the 1980s--Toledo in a shooting by two men believed linked to the MAS and Bateman in an airplane crash. By mid-1988 Carlos Pizarro Leon-Gomez had emerged as one of the group's principal decision makers.

The M-19's ideological orientation was a mixture of populism and nationalistic revolutionary socialism. This orientation often led the group to seek political support from Nicaragua and Cuba, but the M-19's leadership also claimed that it resisted forming permanent foreign ties.

By mid-1985, when the number of active members was estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000, the M-19 had become the second largest guerrilla group in Colombia. According to the IISS, the size of the M-19 in 1987 was estimated at 1,500 militants. A member of the Barco administration who was in charge of the government's peace efforts, however, calculated that the organization had only 500 armed militants nationwide. By the mid-1980s, the M-19 had eclipsed all other guerrilla organizations in urban operations. The M-19 reportedly established columns (units) in each of Colombia's major cities. These columns were in turn organized into independent cells.

Although the M-19's early operations, begun in 1972, were limited to bank robberies, it quickly gained national attention through the 1974 theft of Simon Bolivar's sword and spurs from the exhibit in the liberator's villa. Two years later, the group kidnapped and subsequently murdered a Colombian trade union official the M-19 accused of having ties to the United States Central Intelligence Agency. In 1977 the M-19 began a campaign of economic sabotage. The following year, government offices and police stations became the targets of numerous attacks. In addition, the offices and representatives of United States-based multinational corporations were repeatedly targeted in an effort to drive the foreign interests from the country. Kidnappings of prominent individuals continued, some of which resulted in the deaths of the abductees. In 1980 the seizure and occupation, for sixty-one days, of the Dominican Republic's Bogota embassy gained the group international attention.

The M-19's increasingly bold activities, coupled with evidence of Cuban training and logistical support, prompted a hardening in the policies of the Turbay administration during its final year in office. In 1982, however, the newly installed Betancur administration offered political amnesty in exchange for the M-19's agreement to a cease-fire. In July 1984, government officials and guerrilla leaders signed a cease-fire agreement at Corinto in Cauca Department.

By late 1985, however, the accord unraveled. Charging the government with, among other things, a systematic violation of the truce provisions and failure to implement key political reforms that were part of the cease-fire agreement, the M-19 returned to armed struggle. In October 1985, guerrillas wounded then-Commanding General of the Army Samudio. By far the most spectacular operation of the M-19 came the following month, when commandos seized the Palace of Justice in Bogota. The

ensuing battle between the M-19 and the military left over 100 dead, including 11 Supreme Court judges (see [Interest Groups](#) , ch. 4).

After the Palace of Justice operation, the M-19 reduced its activities, leading some analysts to surmise that its membership base had declined. In early 1986, the M-19 reportedly attempted to establish a common guerrilla front with members of Peru's Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru) and with Ecuador's Alfaro Lives, Damn It! (♦Alfaro Vive, Carajo!) group. The March 1987 killing of Alvaro Fayad, the M-19's top political and military strategist, was believed to have dealt the organization a severe setback, however.

In May 1988, the M-19 again burst into public prominence by kidnapping Alvaro G♦mez Hurtado, a two-time presidential candidate and Conservative Party leader. G♦mez Hurtado's release was obtained two months later in exchange for the government's agreement to meet with M-19 leaders at the papal nunciature in Bogotá♦. The meeting was to have paved the way for a national summit to include representatives of the country's principal guerrilla groups. Barco subsequently announced, however, that he would not send an official representative to the preliminary peace talks.

Data as of December 1988

The surprising stickiness of the “15-minute city”



[Lisa Chamberlain](#)

Communication Lead, Urban Transformation, World Economic Forum

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This article was originally published in [Common Edge](#).

- Urbanism trends come and go but the “15-minute city” framing of walkable, mixed-use urban development is a lot more than a fad.
- The historical roots of the 15-minute city are connected deeply with the current moment—one we will be living with for a long time to come.
- As climate change and global conflict cause shocks and stresses at faster intervals and increasing severity, the 15-minute city will become even more critical.

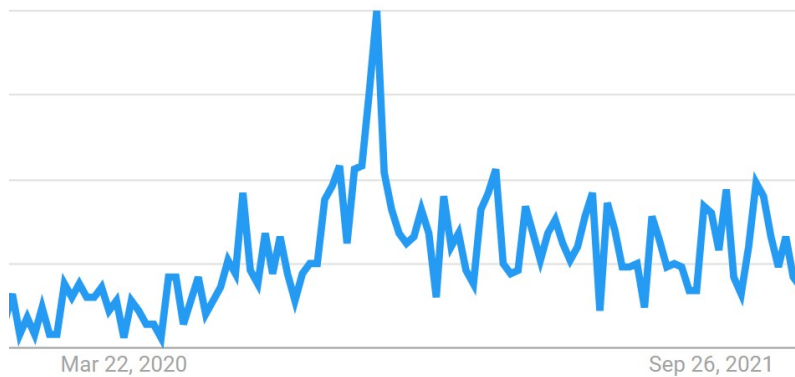
Urbanism trends come and go: Broadacre City, Radiant City, EcoCity. Yet the “[15-minute city](#)” concept—which implies having all necessary amenities within a short walk, bike ride, or public transit trip

from one's home—has demonstrated stickiness not just as an idea, but as a powerful tool for action – from Paris to Seoul, from Bogotá to Houston.

For longtime urbanists, the 15-minute city seemed to merely repackage the historic urban pattern of development: walkable, mixed-used districts. Old wine, new bottle, as the saying goes. But for a new framing to ignite a global urbanism movement, clearly there's more going on.

The obvious, yet incomplete, answer is the pandemic. Would Paris's Mayor Anne Hidalgo have pushed for progressive urban design without this framing? Undoubtedly. But with COVID-19 and its variants keeping everyone home (or closer to home than usual), the 15-minute city went from a “nice-to-have” to a rallying cry. Meeting all of one's needs within a walking, biking or transit distance was suddenly a matter of life and death. The pandemic created an urgency around equitable urbanism that sidelined arguments about bike lanes and other “amenities” that have roiled communities for years.

The term was coined in 2016 by Sorbonne professor Carlos Moreno, who was given an [Obel Award in 2021 for developing the idea](#). The graph below comes from a Google Trend search of worldwide usage of the term; the peak in the middle is approximately November 15, 2020.

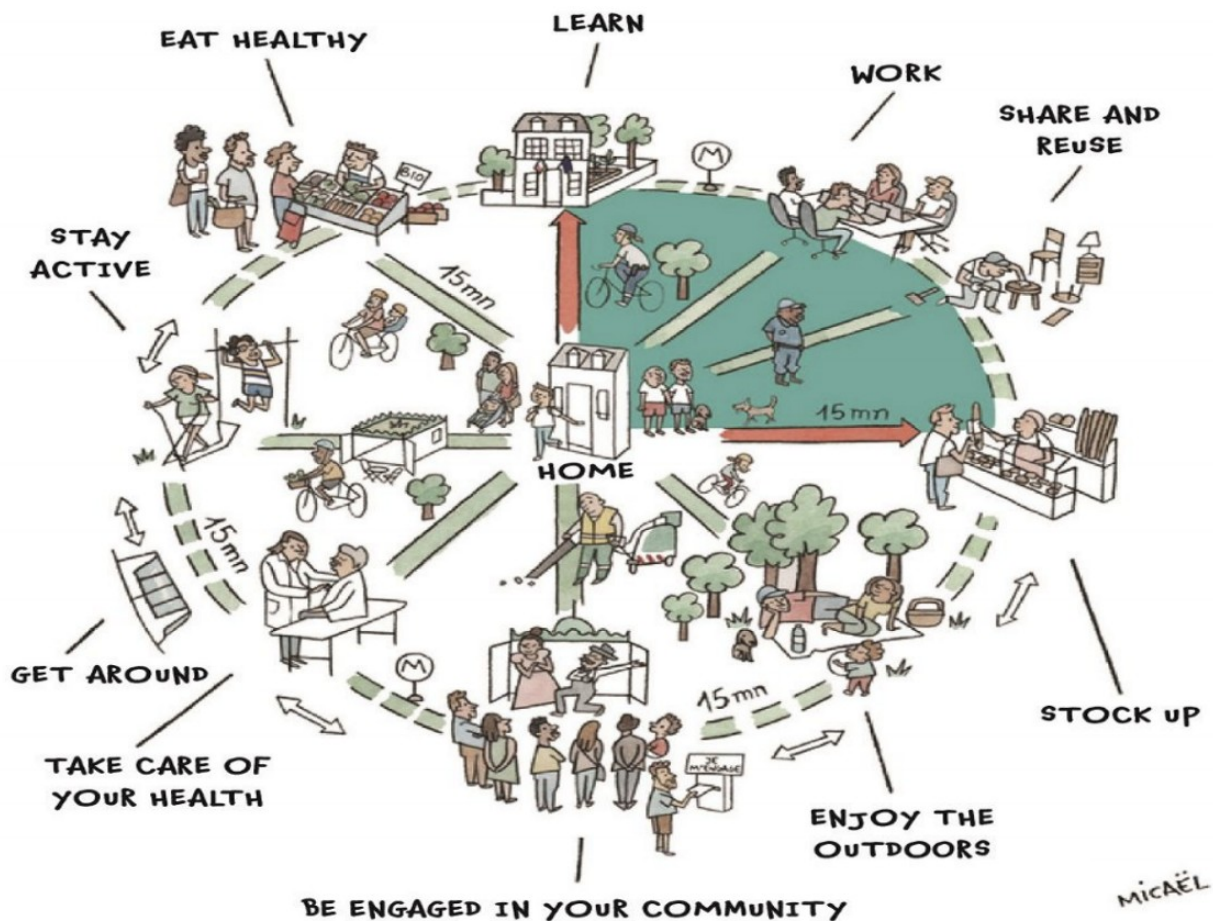


When a new framing meets its moment, something more than a fad is emerging. Prior to the pandemic, few planners would have taken seriously the idea that “home” become the central organizing factor of all urban planning. Despite predictions of increased “telecommuting,” working from home remained an outlier. Indeed, work and commerce have always been the central organizing factors of urbanism, from the post-agricultural revolution to the industrial and technological ones.

Historically, most cities grew up around trade, which then developed into more permanent places of commerce. Cities reduced transportation costs for goods and people by bringing them closer together. By reducing these costs, cities increased productivity and thus further evolved the city as a multiplier of culture and innovation. (As Aristotle said, “The city-state comes into being for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well.”) More than a century after the adoption of automobiles as the dominant mode of transportation, work still dictated urban geography, with increasingly longer commutes. Suburbia, the antithesis of the 15-minute city, couldn’t exist without proximity to an economic urban engine.

The creative destruction of cities

COVID-19 may now be flipping this on its head, which is why the 15-minute city concept is taking hold in a way that it would not have before the pandemic. As demonstrated by the illustration below, the 15-minute city puts home at the center of urban spatial relationships. The point is not to have every cultural amenity and human desire within immediate reach of one's doorstep. New York can only have one Broadway theater district. But there's no question that Midtown Manhattan will have to follow a similar recovery pattern that Lower Manhattan did in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack: diversification. And that is true of the suburbs as well, significantly beyond the extent to which they've already diversified.



Indeed, the decentralization of work is not going to kill the city, it's going to save it. There will be a lot of creative destruction along the way, but that is how the city renews itself: from within. The cities that don't decentralize work will struggle mightily in ways both known and unimaginable.

As climate change and global conflict cause shocks and stresses at faster intervals and increasing severity, the 15-minute city will become even more critical. Anyone who has followed [Erik Klinenberg's work](#) knows that resilience is rooted in place. Specifically, communities that foster and maintain social and economic relationships don't have to be wealthy, but they do need to be walkable and safe, with both residential and commercial buildings intact. And, I would add, for 15-Minute Cities

to thrive, not just survive crises—and this cannot be stressed enough—they must also have plenty of mixed-income and equitable housing, as well as digital access.

This is how neighbors can know and understand each other: as local store owners and workers, colleagues, caregivers, educators, and friends. These are the people who come together when it matters most. The [mutual-aid groups](#) that appeared during the pandemic exemplify the importance of social cohesion in a crisis, which only works if necessities are within a reasonable distance of where people live.

And yet, 15-minute cities are not just a collection of autonomous medieval villages living in a constant state of crisis. The [fractal nature of cities](#) is what makes them dynamic places as a collection of connected neighborhoods with their own cultural histories that evolve over time and contribute to the identity of the larger city (such as the Harlem Renaissance, or the Latin jazz and hip-hop cultures of the South Bronx).

The word “connected” is doing a lot of work here. Yes, people need mass transit and other citywide services. But cities are as much an identity as a place. As historian Yuval Noah Harari might say, cities are a “fiction,” a shared concept that organizes society around cooperation (however tenuous that may seem at times). While Harari focused on nation-states and religion as primary human fictions, I would argue that cities are the most innovative human fiction of all.

Dystopia, utopia, eutopia

In stark contrast to the 15-minute city is the predominant urban trend of the 20th century that continues into the current one: namely, rapid urbanization, both dystopian and utopian. An estimated 1 billion urban poor (1 of every 8 people on the planet) live in informal settlements. Then there’s the dystopian [ghost towns of China](#), where 130 million properties are vacant, which could house about 340 million people, surpassing the current U.S. population. The opposing trend is the ground-up construction of “smart city” utopias, such as [Songdo City](#) in South Korea and [Masdar City](#) in Abu Dhabi, among others. Even though they’re largely considered soulless failures, hope springs eternal: Toyota’s [Woven City](#) is now under construction in Japan.

Between dystopia (bad place) and utopia (no place) is “eutopia,” a town planning term coined by 19th century Scottish polymath Patrick Geddes. It comes from the Greek origin of eu, meaning good, and topos, meaning place. Comprising “folk, work, and place,” eutopia is the best possible manifestation of a city.

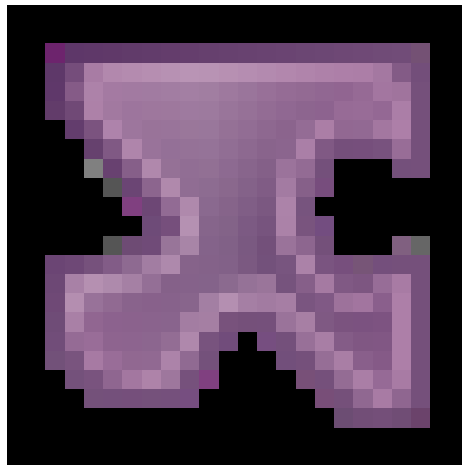
To better quantify and plan eutopias, Geddes developed the concept of a “vital budget.” [He argued](#) that “society must transition from ‘money wages’—which tend to dissipate energies toward individual gains at the expense of both natural and cultural qualities—to a ‘vital budget’ which facilitates ‘conserving energies and organizing [the] environment towards the maintenance and evolution of life – social, individual, civic.’”

This sounds a lot like a 15-minute city, including the circumstances under which it emerged: through the cracks of creative destruction brought on by a technological revolution.

So, what's new about the 15-minute city, then?

As a concept, not much, which is why I initially dismissed it as a fad. But as the “old wine, new bottle” framing went viral (pardon the pun) and began to spark [real change](#), it became clear the historical roots of the 15-minute city connected deeply with the current moment—one that we’ll be living with for a long time to come.

“There is no such thing as a new idea,” Mark Twain once said. “It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and they make new and curious combinations. We keep on turning and making new combinations indefinitely; but they are the same old pieces of colored glass that have been in use through all the ages.”



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